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REVIEWS AND NOTICES

The Mystic Vision in the Grail Legend and in the Divine Comedy.

By LIZETTE ANDREWS FISHER. New York: Columbia University Press, 1917. Pp. x and 148.

"The quest of the Holy Grail," said Hagen, "is one of the most alluring undertakings in the entire field of philology." One readily understands why Miss Fisher should have succumbed to the spell (see p. 31). But it is also one of the most difficult, and a glance at the present dissertation shows that the "chance of finding the master clew" (if such a clew really exists) is not as close at hand as Miss Fisher seems to think. The new quester—we borrow the symbolism which she herself suggests—has zeal and deals with an interesting point, namely, the doctrine of transubstantiation in relation to the two works she discusses, but whether she has brought the problem nearer to a solution we leave it to the reader of this review to judge. Not content with expounding the mystic vision in the Grail, a question certainly worthy of an orderly and scholarly discussion on the basis of a critical examination of the extant *texts*, Miss Fisher extends her theory to the *Divine Comedy*, to be sure "without any undue desire for classification" (p. 28), yet also without any seeming misgiving as to the possibility of adequately treating two such problems in the course of a brief study.

The book has an introduction (pp. 1-7), a chapter on "Transubstantiation in History, Theology, and Devotion [?]" (pp. 8-29), a chapter on the "Grail" (pp. 30-85), a chapter on the "Divine Comedy" (pp. 86-117), several appendices, consisting mainly of citations from mediaeval Latin writers (pp. 118-39), a bibliography of "useful" books¹ (pp. 140-45), and an index (pp. 146-48). It contains five full-page illustrations, the most interesting being those of the patens of Imola and St. Denis, though where there is so much adornment one misses the finely executed miniature of the eucharistic Grail to be found in MS 120 of the Bibliothèque Nationale. The binding is in the usual attractive manner of the Columbia Studies in English and Comparative Literature. Despite the Romance subject, indebtedness to the Romance faculty at Columbia is nowhere expressed.

Miss Fisher sees in the developed Grail legend a combination of the story of Joseph of Arimathea and a quest of Celtic origin. She affirms (p. 32) that "the motive for the combination of two such elements, as far from each

¹ *DuCange's Dictionary* heads the list!

other in character as in origin, has never been adequately explained." And her thesis is that "Robert de Borron, or a writer in Latin prose whose work was adapted to romantic purposes by de Borron, desiring to set forth the doctrine of transubstantiation and to establish certain local claims, combined the story of the quest with that of Joseph of Arimathea, derived from Christian legend." The first statement is not consistent with the facts: all those who have held to the theory of Celtic origin have seen in the Christianization of the Grail a part of a general mediaeval movement in which not only pagan customs but also pagan beliefs and myths were given a Christian character. Josaphat is a Christianization of the Buddha: why? because it aided the proselyting spirit of the age so to consider him. Likewise the Grail, whether blood-vessel or dish of plenty, given its supernatural character, was identified by the relic-loving church with the receptacle of Christ's blood, the cup of the Last Supper, and the Eucharist. See Nutt, *Legend*, p. 255; Heinzel, *Grail-romane*, p. 178; Martin, *Parzival*, II, p. L; Nitze, *PMLA*, XXIV; Brown, *Modern Philology*, XIV, 65. As for the second statement or the thesis proper, its validity would hinge on showing (1) that it was Robert or his supposed Latin source who first gave the Grail its Christian character, and (2) that the *Metrical Joseph* reveals a definite interest in the doctrine of transubstantiation. To these, other considerations are attached which will be brought out below.

Obviously, neither of the foregoing points can be solved without a detailed examination of the Grail texts involved. This Miss Fisher nowhere gives. Not only does she ignore the knotty problem of the authenticity of Robert's extant text, but in a rambling discussion (p. 44) of the poet's personality Bédier comes in for a view which he would probably disavow, while Suchier's theory that Robert was a knight (*ZrP*, XVI; cf. Foerster, *Wtb*, p. 173*: "Da R. Ritter war, kein Geistlicher") is not even adduced. In addition, the *Didot-Perceval* is again listed as the prose rendering of a lost romance of Robert's, regardless of the excellent arguments to the contrary by Sommer in *Beihefte* 17 and by Bruce, *Romanic Review*, IV, 462; the *Parzival* is referred to in Bartsch's, not the standard Martin edition; no mention is made of Loth's translation, now in the second edition, of the *Peredur*, which is said to be preserved "in a MS" (there are eleven); the *Sir Percypelle* is rated as "the most authentic form of the original Celtic tale" on the basis of a view expressed in 1883; no adequate idea is given of the *Perlesvaus*; no attention is paid to the cyclic redactions, on which so much has been written by Wechssler, Sommer, Brugger, Bruce, and others, and Crestien's *Conte del graal* figures only in the Potvin text and not in the now revised reprint of B.N.f. 794 by Baist.

Thus, it is not surprising that the reader gets no consistent account of the characteristics of the Grail as found in Crestien and in Robert. Yet it is quite clear that some such discussion must precede any hypothesis that

Robert or the author of his source is the person who Christianized the Grail, for Brown maintains in his recent study (*op. cit.*, p. 401) that "so far as we can see, the entire connection of the Grail with the eucharistic feast and its later identification with the cup of the Last Supper sprang from these few lines of Chrétien (vss. 6379-93)," while Foerster (*Wtb.*, p. 173*, not mentioned by Miss Fisher) is just as certain that "wie die Sachen liegen, kann Roberts Josef Kristians *livre* gewesen sein," and (p. 158*) "er ist der älteste, einfachste und kürzeste unter den Graltexten . . . [p. 178*] ob Abendmahlschüssel oder Blutschüssel, bei Josef ist beides vereint." In a recent article on the word *graal* (*Modern Philology*, XIII, 681) the question of Christianization was left in abeyance until we shall have a critical edition of the *Joseph* and the complete variants of the Grail passages in Crestien's poem. Until then no one will be able to say with any approach to accuracy who was first responsible for the Christian concept of the Grail.

As for the doctrine of transubstantiation, Miss Fisher gives an adequate, if not complete, account of its history. At the same time, "Paschasius, a monk of Corbey" (p. 15) is hardly an apt appellation of Radbert, surnamed Paschasius,¹ the famous Benedictine of Corbie; his important treatise (*De corpore et sanguine Christi*) is not named; the account of Berengar should have been fuller; see Gröber, *Gr.*, II, 1, 226; Hildebert of Lavardin, also known as Hildebert of Tours, in many ways the most important person treated, has no date, his connection with Brittany is not mentioned, nor does the bibliography give Dieudonné's book on him (Paris, 1898); the treatment of Hugh of St. Victor seems scanty, especially since the summary on page 26 would lead the unwary to infer that he was one of the "mystics of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries," etc. But, above all, the relation of transubstantiation to the Grail texts needs to be set in a clearer light if the theory is to carry conviction.

As it is, Miss Fisher points out the importance of the Lateran Council in 1215 for the establishment of this doctrine—and, generally speaking, 1215 is the date of the great florescence of the Grail story; on pages 58 ff. she discusses with considerable acumen the varying concept of the word "chalice," and she wisely stresses the importance of Robert's "secret words" (pp. 53 ff.). But she fails to note Heinzl's reference (*op. cit.*, p. 89) to "die ganze Auffassung des Gralcults als einer Art Mëssopfer mit Transubstantion und Communion," the idea that any Christian writer would necessarily borrow this element, ultimately, from Latin mediaeval literature (Birch-Hirschfeld, *Sage*, p. 221), and, particularly, that it is always possible that the significant passage in Robert was interpolated into the second redaction (Heinzl, *loc. cit.*). Thus, the facts, as far as we know them, are these: Although the *Perlesvaus* in one place represents the Grail as "all in flesh," and in another, not mentioned by Miss Fisher, as in the shape of a

¹ The full name does not occur until p. 76.

"chalice,"¹ this romance clings to the view that the holy vessel is a blood relic; and it is not certain, to use Heinzel's words, "ob der Verfasser darunter die Abendmahlschüssel verstand." Crestien gives two rather different accounts of the *grail*, the first of which is in distinctly pagan surroundings (cf. Nitze, *Elliott Studies*, I), the second apparently much Christianized (cf. Brown, *loc. cit.*). Finally, Robert's text, granting for the sake of argument that it is *not* a reworking, simply compares the Grail service with the mass but does not identify them (*Modern Philology*, IX, 319).

In short, the process of Christianization is gradual, and transubstantiation, as pointed out by Heinzel, is an incident in the process, and not, in our opinion, the prime motive.

But Miss Fisher argues that in combining the "Celtic tale" with the legend of Joseph of Arimathea Robert also had the motive of establishing "certain local claims." These relate, of course, to the well-known association of the Grail story with Glastonbury Abbey. In settling these claims, however, on Robert, Miss Fisher is oblivious of the literature on this subject (Zarncke, *Paul u. Braunes Beiträge*, III, 317; Baist, *ZrP*, XIX, 320, and *Prorektoratsrede*, p. 15; Nitze, *Modern Philology*, I, 247; Lot, *Mélanges d'histoire bretonne*, pp. 267 ff.; Weston, *Quest of the Holy Grail*, p. 61; and Brugger, *ZFSL*, XXXI, 169, note).² These references would have shown that the *Perlesvaus* had a greater share than the *Joseph* in establishing the Glastonbury connection. The entire episode of Arthur's visit to the Chapel of St. Austin, with which the *Perlesvaus* begins, is found in *Johannis Glastoniensis* and not merely the excerpt given by Miss Fisher in Appendix VI; and the same episode is also used in the interesting *Histoire de Foulke Fitz-Warin* (ed. Michel, p. 110). Had Miss Fisher fixed upon the *Perlesvaus*, with its strongly allegorizing tendency, and the historical connection of Glastonbury and Fécamp, which she mentions but does not develop (p. 53), instead of Robert, we believe she would have seen the Grail development in a clearer and truer perspective.

Thus, while Robert's *Joseph* is of great importance, a proper understanding of it and the other Grail texts rests on a first-hand knowledge of the material they contain and the scholarly discussion with regard to them. To fall short of this ideal serves only to confuse a problem long recognized as one of the most puzzling in all literature.

With regard to the *Divine Comedy*, Miss Fisher's thesis is that Beatrice on her appearance in the earthly paradise symbolizes the Eucharist, and that the procession of the earthly paradise is modeled on the Corpus Christi

¹ See Evans' translation, II, 112. Gietmann, *Ein Gralbuch*, gives a very useful exposition of the allegory in the *Perlesvaus*.

² Baist thinks that the original *Perlesvaus* was also the source of Robert; compare the list of views given in *Modern Philology*, XIII, 682, n. 3. On all this see now "The Glastonbury Passages in the *Perlesvaus*," *North Carolina Studies in Philology*, XV (1918), 7 ff.

procession. Miss Fisher admits (p. 107) that "this whole conception of the mystic procession, and especially that of the place of Beatrice in it, is disturbing, almost shocking, at first presentation." It is furthermore untenable.

What Beatrice symbolizes we may learn with complete assurance from the last chapter of the *De Monarchia*—perhaps the most important passage in all Dante for the general understanding of his view of life:

Duos igitur fines Providentia illa inenarrabilis homini proposuit intendendos; beatitudinem scilicet huius vitae, quae in operatione propriae virtutis consistit, et per terrestrem Paradisum figuratur; et beatitudinem vitae aeternae, quae consistit in fruitione divini aspectus ad quam propria virtus ascendere non potest, nisi lumine divino adiuta, quae per Paradisum coelestem intelligi datur.

Ad has quidem beatitudines, velut ad diversas conclusiones, per diversa media venire oportet. Nam ad primam per philosophica documenta venimus, dummodo illa sequamur, secundum virtutes morales et intellectuales operando. Ad secundam vero per documenta spiritualia, quae humanam rationem transcendunt, dummodo illa sequamur secundum virtutes theologicas operando, Fidem, Spem scilicet et Caritatem. Has igitur conclusiones et media (licet ostensa sint nobis haec ab humana ratione, quae per philosophos tota nobis innotuit; haec a Spiritu Sancto, qui per Prophetas et Hagiographos, qui per coaeternum sibi Dei Filium Iesum Christum, et per eius discipulos, supernaturalem veritatem ac nobis necessariam revelavit) humana cupiditas postergaret, nisi homines tamquam equi, sua bestialitate vagantes, in camo et freno compercerentur in via.

Later in the same chapter (line 78) the word *revelata* is used to replace the two words *documenta spiritualia*.

Just as Virgil symbolizes the *philosophica documenta* by which we are guided to the lesser blessedness, symbolized by the earthly paradise, so Beatrice symbolizes the *documenta spiritualia* or *revelata* by which we are guided to the supreme blessedness, symbolized by the heavenly paradise.

And the words *haec a Spiritu Sancto . . . revelavit* convey perfectly the essential symbolism of the procession in the earthly paradise. Divine truth is revealed through the Holy Spirit, the sacred writers, Christ, and his disciples. The persons of Dante's procession are the candlesticks, which represent the Holy Spirit; the elders, representing Holy Writ; the Griffin, representing Christ; the four creatures, representing the evangelists; and the virtues, whose relation to the scheme of blessedness is sufficiently defined by Dante within the passage quoted.

Quo vero, illa falsa. Miss Fisher's arguments are faulty both in process and in detail.

Her general reasoning as to the resemblance of Dante's pageant to the Corpus Christi procession is singularly weak; for she offers no satisfactory evidence to indicate that Dante ever saw a Corpus Christi procession and no satisfactory evidence as to the character of early Italian Corpus Christi processions. The Corpus Christi procession was authorized in 1311 by the

council of Vienne. As to its earlier existence, Miss Fisher (p. 95) reports only an unverified statement by Martène (1763-64) that "contemporary books of ritual show that the procession followed very closely on the institution of the festival," and a priori opinions expressed by Catalani (1738-39). For her description of Corpus Christi processions she relies on Martène, on Picart (1733-39), and on Kirchmaier's account (1570) of a procession in the England of his day; and she asserts other traits (p. 92) for which she cites no authority. Ritual processions of various sorts were common enough in the Middle Ages; and the establishment of Miss Fisher's thesis would have required her to show that the procession of the earthly paradise corresponded with early Italian Corpus Christi processions in their specifically differentiated character; but this is quite beyond her power.

Miss Fisher makes much of the fact that the Bull of Urban, by which the festival of Corpus Christi was established, mentions the rejoicing of Faith, Hope, and Charity in a manner suggesting the dance of these virtues in Dante. But if one reads the whole passage (p. 94) from the Bull the resemblance loses its distinctness:

Tunc enim omnium corda et vota, ora et labia, hymnos persolvant laetitiae salutaris; tunc psallat fides; spes tripudiet; exultet charitas; devotio plaudat; jubilet chorus; puritas jucundetur. Tunc singuli, alacri animo, pronaque voluntate convenient sua studia laudabiliter exequendo, tanti festi solemnitatem celebrantes.

And Dante, it may be remarked, nowhere mentions either Urban or the Corpus Christi festival.

Miss Fisher gives no evidence of familiarity with the bibliography of the *Purgatorio* beyond references to Vossler, Symonds, and Moore—an omission that would go far in itself to discredit her work. She has, however, found mention of different theories as to the symbolism of Beatrice (p. 101):

Why, for example, is Beatrice the central figure? It has been said that she here personifies revelation, or the authority of the church, or the ideal papacy. It is never safe, of course, to claim a single, exclusive meaning for any part of Dante's allegory, and Beatrice may figure all of these, but not one of them accounts for her sudden descent into the midst of such a procession. In any of these characters her fitting place would be within the chariot at its first appearance, but Dante becomes aware of her presence only after certain ceremonies of ritual significance.

It is never safe to assume vagueness in the mind of Dante; and it is eminently fitting that the symbol of revelation should appear after ceremonies of ritual significance.

W. A. NITZE

ERNEST H. WILKINS

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO